

# Castlemaine Naturalist

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Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.



*Pterostylis striata* Striped Greenhood

- Photo by Noel Young on May 4

## Taxonomic Changes to Birds of the Mt Alexander Shire

Chris Timewell

In 1994, Les Christidis (then the Senior Curator of Ornithology at the Museum Victoria) and Walter Boles (with the Australian Museum) released *The Taxonomy and Species of Birds of Australia and Its Territories* (published by the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union). Despite a few disagreements on particular items from other specialists, it soon became broadly accepted as (a) the standard list of birds occurring within Australian territories, (b) their accepted common and latin names and (c) their accepted taxonomic relationships. Their work was more than just a list of bird species, but also contained taxonomic justifications for splitting or lumping species, and placing them into a particular genus, family or order. It was also useful to have a standard list for the common English names of Australian birds, as the same species often had a different common name in different localities, which often led to confusion (e.g., Masked Lapwing / Spur-winged Plover, thick-knee / stone-curlew, Australian Hobby / Little Falcon, Peewee / Mudlark / Magpie-lark). While this text was used for many purposes, bird twitchers were perhaps the most enthusiastic and vocal advocates, using it to settle arguments when creating their lists of bird species seen.

Not too long after it was first published, rumours abounded of a possible second revised edition. The rumours eventually turned out to be true, but it was not until 2008 that another version of the book appeared on bookstore shelves (Christidis, L., and Boles, W. E., 2008, *Systematics and Taxonomy of Australian Birds*. CSIRO Publishing). It contained quite a few changes to the taxonomic status of many birds known to occur in Australia. It also added many new species to the list of birds known to occur in Australia, including a few new vagrant visitors detected on the mainland, plus a large number of species recently found during targeted searches on remote Australian territorial islands (e.g. Christmas Island, Ashmore Reef, etc.).

Again, despite some disagreements from specialists on particular items, the revised version of this book was quickly accepted as the standard (a) list of all bird species known to occur in Australia and its territories, including migrants, vagrants and extinct species, (b) common and latin names to be used for Australian birds, and (c) taxonomic relationships between Australian birds. Birds Australia (formerly the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union) has endorsed and adopted both the taxonomic findings and recommended nomenclature of the second edition.

Personally, I have always had a soft spot for the under-appreciated *CSIRO list of vertebrate fauna in Australia* (by Clayton et al, 2006), as it also (a) lists all the recognized subspecies occurring in Australia for each species, (b) identifies which state and territory that each species and subspecies is known to occur, and (c) states whether their occurrence in each state or territory is considered to be as residents/regular visitors or as vagrants. However, I accept that I am in the minority here.

Using the 2008 *Systematics and Taxonomy of Australian Birds*, the following four sections summarise the recommended changes to the taxonomic status of those Australian birds that are known to occur in the Mt Alexander shire. The first of these summarises relevant changes to the taxonomic status of Mt Alexander birds at the Order level, which is the next major taxonomic level down from Class (all birds occur in the Class Aves). The second part will focus upon Family level changes. The third, Genus level changes, and the fourth, Species-level changes (which includes changes to their common names).

The 2006 version of the "Birds of Mt Alexander" brochure, produced by the CFNC, was used to identify which birds are known to occur in the shire, and regularity with which they occur (e.g., common, rare, etc.). While only the changes to the common names of these birds that are proposed by Christidis and Boles (2008) may affect future versions of the *Birds of Mt Alexander* brochures, it is still interesting to consider how scientific consensus changes over time. For example, I would not have guessed that the Owlet-nightjar is more closely related to needletails and swifts than it is to frogmouths and nightjars, but it makes sense when considering the shape of their body and wings. Similarly, I wouldn't have guessed that the Regent Honeyeater was a type of wattlebird.

**NB:** I'm not a taxonomist, nor have I been specifically trained in taxonomy. Another key source of information on the taxonomic changes to the birds of Mt. Alexander shire was the Birds Australia website (<http://www.birdsaustralia.com.au/birds/checklist.html>). I'm happy to receive feedback if anyone feels that I have misinterpreted the taxonomic changes recommended by Christidis and Boles.

## **1 - Changes at the ORDER Level.**

From the 1994 to 2008 version of the *Systematics and Taxonomy of Australian Birds* by L. Christidis and W. Boles, there have been five changes at the order-level which affect birds known to occur in the Mt Alexander shire. These changes, and the bird species that they affect, have been summarized below.

**Emu *Dromaius novaehollandiae*** ( locally extinct(?) in the Mt Alexander Shire (MAS)) – Emus and the Southern Cassowary were formerly in the Order Struthioniformes. These species have been moved into a new order, the Order Casuariiformes. For birds occurring in Australia, the only remaining species in the Order Struthioniformes is the introduced Ostrich *Struthio camelus* (there is probably only one location in Australia where it is possible that a feral population of Ostrich still persists – near Port Augusta in South Australia).

**Australian Owlet-Nightjar *Aegotheles cristatus*** (fairly common in MAS) - The Family Aegothelidae (of which the Australian Owlet-nightjar is the sole member occurring in Australia) has been moved out of the Order Caprimulgiformes (which includes the frogmouths and true nightjars) and into the existing Order Apodiformes (which includes the needletails, swifts and swiftlets).

**Australasian Darter, Cormorants (Little Pied, Pied, Great and Little Black) and the Australian Pelican** - The former Order Pelecaniformes is now considered to be no longer relevant to any Australian birds. Four of the five families of Australian birds from this order (containing species such as the frigatebirds, gannets, boobys, Australasian Darter and the cormorants) have been moved to a new order called Order Phalacrocoraciformes. The remaining family, Family Pelecanidae, of which the Australian Pelican is the sole Australian member, has been moved from the Order Pelecaniformes into the existing Order Ciconiiformes (which contains species such as the bitterns, egrets, ibis, spoonbills, herons).

**Diurnal raptors / birds of prey** – Both raptor families occurring within Australia (the Accipitridae and Falconidae) were previously placed within the Order Falconiformes. The Family Accipitridae (which includes the kites, eagles, goshawks, harriers) has now been split away and placed within a new order, Order Accipitriformes. The Family Falconidae (which includes the Nankeen Kestrel, the falcons and the Australian Hobby) remains within the order Falconiformes.

**Painted Button-quail *Turnix varius*** (fairly common in MAS) - The family which includes the Painted Button-quail and all other button-quails, Family Turnicidae, has been moved from the Order Turniciformes into the existing Order Charadriiformes. The Order Charadriiformes already includes species such as the Bush Stone-curlew, avocets, plovers, lapwings, dotterels, snipes, sandpipers, terns and gulls. The Order Turniciformes is now no longer relevant to Australian birds.

## **2 - Changes at the FAMILY Level.**

From the 1994 to 2008 version of the *Systematics and Taxonomy of Australian Birds* by L. Christidis and W. Boles, there have been eight changes at the family-level affecting birds known to occur in the Mt Alexander shire. These family-level changes, and the bird species that they affect, are summarized below.

**White-throated Nightjar *Eurostopodus mystacalis*** (very rare in the Mt Alexander shire (MAS)) - The Family Caprimulgidae formerly included all of the nightjars occurring in Australia, but has now been split into two separate families. The Spotted Nightjar and the White-throated Nightjar have been moved into a new

family, Family Eurostopodidae. Other nightjars known to occur in Australia remain in the family Caprimulgidae (none of which have been recorded from the MAS).

**Little bush birds** - Many of the small bush birds occurring in the Mt Alexander Shire (i.e., pardalotes, scrubwrens, heathwrens, warblers, Weebill, gerygones and thornbills) were formerly placed in the Family Pardalotidae. All of these species, except the pardalotes, have been moved into a new family, the Acanthizidae. The pardalotes remain within the Family Pardalotidae.

**Spotted Quail-thrush *Cinclosoma punctatum*** (seldom seen in MAS) - The Spotted Quail-thrush, plus all other quail-thrush, whipbirds and wedgebills that occur elsewhere in Australia, have been moved from the Family Cinclosomatidae into the new Family Eupetidae. There are no Australian birds remaining within the Family Cinclosomatidae.

**Fantails, Willie Wagtail, flycatchers, Magpie-lark** – These bird species were all in the Family Dicruridae. Two new families have been split off from this family:- the Family Rhipiduridae (which includes the fantails and Willie Wagtail) and the Family Monarchidae (which includes the resident flycatchers, the monarchs and the Magpie-lark). The Spangled Drongo *Dicrurus bracteatus*, from northern Australia, is the only Australia bird which remains within the Family Dicruridae.

**Golden-headed Cisticola, Australian Reed-warbler, Little Grassbird, songlarks** - These species were all formerly part of the Family Sylviidae. This has been split into four separate families: the Family Cisticolidae (the cisticolas), the Family Acrocephalidae (the reed-warblers), the Family Megaluridae (the grassbirds and songlarks) and the Family Phylloscopidae (of which, only the vagrant Arctic Warbler has been recorded from Australia, and not from the Mt Alexander shire). The Family Sylviidae is now no longer relevant to Australian birds.

**Silvereye *Zosterops lateralis*** (common in MAS) - The Silvereye (and the white-eyes from northern Australia) were formerly within the family Zosteropidae. All Australian species from this family have been placed into a new family called Family Timaliidae.

**Bassian Thrush *Zoothera lunulata*** (uncommon in MAS), **Common Blackbird *Turdus merula*** (introduced – very common in MAS) – Most native and introduced thrushes and blackbirds occurring in Australia have been moved out of the Family Muscicapidae, and into the new family of Turdidae. There are a small number of vagrant visitors to Australia which remain within the Family Muscicapidae, none of which have been recorded in the Mt Alexander Shire (e.g., Blue Rock Thrush, Isabelline Wheatear, Narcissus Flycatcher).

**Zebra Finch, Red-browed Finch, Diamond Firetail, House Sparrow** – All of the finches, firetails and mannikins, sparrows that are native to Australia, and all of the introduced ones as well, were formerly within the Family Passeridae. All of the native finches, all of the native and introduced mannikins and some of the introduced sparrows have been moved to the Family Estrildidae. The remaining introduced sparrows, including the House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*, remain within the Family Passeridae.

**[ To be continued next month, covering changes at genus and species level ]**



## **King Island**

### **Nigel Harland**

Anne and I and a friend from Albury made the short trip to King Island recently. We stayed for three days and the weather was highly variable. The wind was fairly constant, but the rain and sunshine were both intermittent. We stayed in Currie, which is where the airport is and hired a four wheel drive vehicle. It is not absolutely necessary to have a 4WD, but some of the roads would have been a bit precarious in a conventional vehicle.

Much of the island is cleared and cattle are the most common inhabitants. There were a few sheep, but not many. There were one or two forested areas and some highly spectacular coastal scenery. Apart from Currie there are really just two other settlements on the island – Grassy is on the southern extremity and Naracoopa is on the eastern side. There is accommodation and facilities at both, but Currie is the main centre.

We saw a total of 72 species of birds in the three days, nothing terribly spectacular (apart from a Wild Turkey - new for me!). The highlight was meeting up with Clive Minton who is a bird bander extraordinaire. There was a group of ten or so people with him and they were banding Ruddy Turnstones. Quite a number were netted and we watched the process with great interest. When they had finished banding a bird, we were asked if we would like to let them go. I hesitated, because as a child I had been pecked by one of my grandmother's hens and since then I have been unable to touch a bird. However, Clive's approach was quite gentle and he showed me how to hold and release them and the fear disappeared – just as the Turnstones did!

The steaks are terrific and the cheese factory (fromagerie!) is highly recommended. All in all a most enjoyable trip, but not a location which I would say you really had to do.

## **Arrival of the Swifties**

### **Noel Young**

The prolific flowering of eucalypts has seen the return of considerable numbers of Swift Parrots to Victoria this year. Since Debbie's first sighting of 10 birds on 9<sup>th</sup> April (see 'Observations') there have been further sightings registered on the Birdline website by Geoff Park in the Newstead area (also see Geoff's blog "Natural Newstead" for detail and pictures) and indeed, by May 3<sup>rd</sup>, Deb informed me she has seen flocks of up to 60 birds on the Mia mia track, and up to 40 in the golf course area. Further afield, up to 80 birds remained at the You Yangs late April, and others have been reported at Chiltern, Rushworth, Maryborough and Talbot.

Some of us will be forming teams for the national survey (Swift Parrot/Regent Honeyeater) organised by Birds Australia's Threatened Bird Network. The first will be held on May 15 and 16, and the other will be August 7 and 8

## **The Field Trip That Wasn't**

### **Rita Mills**

Two car loads set off happily for Blackwood, and though we were prepared for anything weatherwise, it turned out to be a very pleasant afternoon. We took a short cut from Bullarto to Newbry through some magnificent timber, and across both the Loddon and the Coliban, close to their headwaters and only a very short distance apart.

At Blackwood we caught up with the van Smerdyks, and I drove off a short distance up to where we were to have our lunch. I couldn't make out why no one else was coming, but it wasn't long before I learned the awful truth. Noel's 4x4 decided that it had had enough, and refused to budge.

While we waited for the RACV man to arrive from Ballan, nearly an hour away, we went for a walk along part of the Great Dividing Trail walk through the streets, and some brave souls (not me!) even walked a distance along a narrow path above a steep drop. It was a lovely walk, past some beautiful gardens. There were huge clouds and sunshine, and at the side of the steep road we found seedlings of Candlebarks, Manna Gums, and Peppermints. There were glorious autumn colours, interesting old buildings, beautiful trees, and I found someone had planted a Choricema, a Western Australian pea with clashing vermilion and pink petals that look marvellous, near their front gate.

There were a number of birds seen, including Currawongs, New Holland Honeyeaters, Crimson Rosellas, Eastern Spinebills and White-naped Honeyeaters.

Eventually we arranged for another vehicle (via public phone - no mobile reception) to come and collect some of us, me to take home others, and the RACV man to return and collect Noel and vehicle (another couple of hours wait for Noel and company!). Afterwards Denis headed off to Ballan to collect Noel. What a day! Nobody could claim that it was a dull afternoon. Perhaps we didn't do what we intended, but it was definitely full of interest, and Noel's vehicle now has a new brain, sorry, computer thing, and is working again.

## **Wildflower notes by Richard Piesse**

### **Plant surveys 26<sup>th</sup> March Centre Track – four orchids in flower**

<i>Corunastylis</i> sp affin <i>rufa</i>	Dark Midge orchid
<i>Eriochilus cucullatus</i>	Parsons' Bands
<i>Pterostylis</i> sp affin <i>parviflora</i>	Red-tip Greenhood
<i>Pterostylis</i> sp affin <i>revoluta</i>	Large Autumn Greenhood

### **Taradale walk 31<sup>st</sup> March – Fryers Ra–Coliban channel & Humboldt mine**

<i>Pterostylis</i> sp affin <i>parviflora</i>	Red-tip Greenhood
<i>Eriochilus cucullatus</i>	Parsons' Bands

*Pelargonium rodneyanum*  
*Cryptandra amara*

Magenta Stork's – bill  
Bitter Cryptandra

### **Creswick walk 8<sup>th</sup> April**

*Hardenbergia violacea*

Purple Coral-pea

*Astroloma humifusum*

Cranberry Heath

*Wahlenbergia stricta* ssp *stricta*

Tall Bluebell

*Pterostylis melagramma*

Tall Greenhood

## **Observations**

### At the April meeting:-

- ◆ Geraldine had photos of a long tailed (New Holland?) mouse taken at the Grampians and a Perrins? Frog on a toilet seat
- ◆ *Pterostylis revoluta* losing heads to hungry Hares - Natalie
- ◆ Rita noted a Common Bronzewing feeding on the berries of saltbush, and passed around a photo of a sugar glider in amongst Rosella nestlings in a nest box.
- ◆ Grey Box is flowering profusely in various places – Dianne Thompson
- ◆ Debbie Worland reported seeing ten Swift Parrots at the golf course
- ◆ Bluebells and Parsons Bands flowering at Expedition Pass - Denis

### Late April -

- ◆ Rita passed on an observation by Ian Higgins of a white morph Grey Goshawk at 10 am on 18<sup>th</sup> April, where Princess St crosses the stream at Campbells Ck.
- ◆ Denis had seen a male Rufous Whistler, a Scarlet Robin, and two Boobook Owls at home.
- ◆ Rita reported a Frogmouth seen in Blakely Rd, and a Boobook calling, and forty Yellow tailed Black Cockatoos at Little Bendigo
- ◆ John Alexander has seen a female Scarlet Honeyeater on the Mia Mia track near Newstead.
- ◆ Chris Morris had two Common Bronzewing Pigeons scratching in the leaf litter in the garden.
- ◆ I found a Powerful Owl in the Botanical Gardens on Friday 16<sup>th</sup> April and again on Monday 18<sup>th</sup> – Noel Young
- ◆ Denis Hurley found a group of Striped Greenhood orchids on one of his favourite tracks. [cover photo]

<b>Disclaimer:</b> The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club
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# Castlemaine Field Naturalists Programme

## May 2010

**Fri May 14 meeting:** NEIL MARRIOTT on Grevilleas

**Sat May 15 field trip:** Sailors Falls

**Sat May 15 Swift Parrot survey 7am (1 to 2 hours)**

**Sat May 22 Roadside clean-up 9 am start**

**Fri June 11 meeting:** PAT BINGHAM "Fine feathers make fine birds"

**Sat June 12 field trip:** Welsh Village

**Fri July 9 meeting:** NICK LAYNE The Loddon River

**Sat July 10 field trip:** Hamiltons Crossing on the Loddon

### VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

**General meetings** - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 8.00 pm.

**Field Trips** - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

**Business meetings** - fourth Thursday of each month, except December, at Denis Hurley's; 20 Merrifield St., at 7.30 pm. All members are invited to attend.

### Subscriptions for 2010

Ordinary membership: Single \$27, Family \$35

Pensioner or student: Single \$24, Family \$29

Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

### 2010 Committee

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